

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 6 | Number 1

Article 12

Fall 12-1-1986

The Start

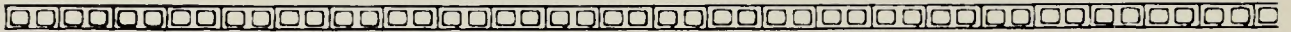
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Recommended Citation

McAninch, Michael (1986) "The Start," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol6/iss1/12>

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The Start

Michael McAninch

Cold and forbidding, it stretches out before me. Walled in on both sides by the uncrossable lines, alone and pinned in, I ready myself for the hell about to come. I glance down. There is a number three, and I am now that three. My name, to the man with the gun, is Lane Three. He knows me as no other. "Sweats off, gentlemen," he screams with impatience. I remove my sweats slowly in my normal routine, for it is bad luck to do it differently. "Hurry up, three, we don't have all day," nags the gruff voice of the starter. "Screw you," I think to myself as I finish my task and take my place behind the blocks. Beads of sweat start to appear on my forehead as the adrenalin pumps through my veins. My mind is now blank. "Take your marks." Unconsciously, I drop to a knee. Reaching back with my left foot, I don't stop at the footrest, but I continue past it and stretch my leg out. Then my foot directs itself to the footrest, and my left knee comes to rest on the icy surface of the track. My right leg follows in the same methodic steps, until the icy sensation is felt in both knees. With my feet set in the blocks, I straighten up and look down the forbidding track in front of me. Systematically I brush the gravel and dirt from my hands and tuck my chain in my shirt. My mind is blank. My hands then find their mark in well-rehearsed fashion. Now the ice of the track is in them as well. Humped over and ready, my head comes up. Quickly my eyes find the gun: that all important gun. More sweat appears. "Set." My muscles tense. The right leg straightens itself out. Coiled like a snake about to strike, I wait. I am no longer looking at the gun, but instead straight down. I will rely on my hearing, for now I can hear nothing else but the sound of the gun. More sweat appears. The walls tower up on each side of me. My mind is blank. The icy sensation now courses through my whole body. I am ready to explode. Listen, listen, listen for that one blast. My heart beats faster. More sweat appears. My mind is blank. The gun sounds.